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Scotland's language communities and the 1+2 Language Strategy

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- The Scottish Government's ambitious 1+2 Language Strategy, launched in 2012, has refocused attention on language policy in education and the provision for language learning in Scotland.
- The Language Strategy contains a commitment for schools to further develop links involving "language communities" and to teach "the community languages of pupils in schools".
- However, a review of the implementation of the policy reveals the languages on offer in mainstream schools remain dominated by a narrow range of European languages such as French and German.
- The learning of community languages of an increasingly diverse population remains the preserve of complementary schools organised by language community members and operating in the evenings and the weekend.
- Numerous studies in the UK and internationally have acknowledged the pivotal educational, social and cultural role of complementary schools. However, learners' linguistic achievements gained at complementary schools often remain hidden from mainstream schools.
- A national survey of complementary school providers highlights a desire to improve their language learning provision and to be involved more in 1+2 developments at a local authority level.
- Developing meaningful partnerships between the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), local authorities, complementary schools and mainstream schools needs to be an integral part of the 1+2 Language Strategy.
- Extending and enhancing language learning provision in and outside of mainstream schools will add much weight to the Scottish Government's policy aspiration to develop a new generation of plurilingual citizens.

Policy context

Scotland's school population is becoming increasingly more linguistically diverse. Data from the Scottish Schools Census 2018 (all publicly funded primary, secondary and special schools) identified 44,311 pupils (6.5%) learning English as an additional language (EAL) and speaking 149 different languages. This current number of EAL pupils shows an increase of 95% from 2010 when the data was first recorded nationally. At present there are very few opportunities for these children and young people to use and develop their first languages in mainstream schools for educational purposes.

The Scottish Government's 1+2 Language Strategy, launched in 2012, has refocused attention on language policy in education and the provision for language learning in Scottish schools. This radical reform of language learning is based on the 1+2 model recommended by the European Union (EU) and adopted in many European countries and beyond. The ambitious aim is that, by 2021, every school will offer children the opportunity to learn a first additional language from Primary 1 (4-5 years of age), and a second additional language by Primary 5 (8-9 years of age). This 1+2 provision will continue until learners reach the end of Secondary 3 (13-14 years of age).

The 1+2 Language Strategy document includes a commitment to further develop links involving "language communities" to "derive maximum benefit from foreign language communities in Scotland" (Scottish Government 2012, p. 24). The responsibility for putting the strategy into practice is devolved to the 32 local authorities in Scotland and schools can make informed choices about the additional languages to introduce, including languages of the strong economies of the future and community languages of pupils.

However, a review of progress on implementing the strategy shows the languages on offer in mainstream schools remain dominated almost entirely by a narrow range of European languages, such as French and German, and a small number of classes teaching Mandarin and British Sign Language (BSL) ([Christie et al. 2016](#)). As yet, there are no established examples in primary schools of teaching community languages such as Polish, Urdu and Arabic.

This narrow provision means it is left to concerned parents from language communities to organise schools and classes themselves in order to develop their children's heritage languages and literacies as it is integral to cultural traditions. These complementary schools (also known as "community", "supplementary" or "heritage language" schools) operate in the evenings and weekends and play a key role in ensuring productive parent-teacher engagement. As community-led schools, they enjoy parental support and therefore foster greater engagement with parents compared with mainstream schools ([Ramalingam and Griffith 2015](#)). Although the different language communities are aware of the complementary schools in their geographical area through social networking, the provision remains a hidden and untapped national resource for language planning and valuing the linguistic diversity of school communities.

This policy paper reports on a national survey of complementary school providers in order to gain insights into the perspectives of "language communities" in relation to community language learning and their awareness of the 1+2 Language Strategy. This evidence is then used to identify aspects of the 1+2 Language Strategy that could be enhanced and strategies for achieving this.

Methodology

A multi-strategy and mixed methods approach was undertaken in order to gather both quantitative and qualitative data and to support data triangulation. The research design included four overlapping phases: two knowledge exchange seminars involving practitioners, local government staff and other stakeholders, which helped to establish a database of complementary school providers for future networking; an internet search to confirm schools previously identified and pinpoint others that may have been missed; a four-part questionnaire sent to all confirmed schools gathering information about the school, pupils, teachers, resources, involvement with the 1+2 Strategy and other details; follow-up semi-structured interviews with questionnaire participants who indicated they would be willing to provide further information. This snowball method of communication with local authority staff and internet search identified 62 complementary schools or classes providing 18 different heritage languages. The questionnaire was sent to all 62 schools and received 21 responses (a 33% response rate); this is above response rates for nationally distributed surveys.

Research findings and challenges

The mapping exercise identified provision for 18 languages: Polish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Arabic, Urdu, Punjabi, Hebrew, Hindi, Russian, Greek, Japanese, Farsi, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Italian and Dutch. The audit reveals a strong network of Polish and Chinese schools, reflecting current Scottish Schools Census data. There is also diversity within language communities with a range of Polish, Chinese, and Arabic schools serving the different needs of the community. The 2018 Schools Census shows 149 different languages spoken by pupils in Scottish schools; the most widely spoken are Polish (16,425), Urdu (6,312), Arabic (4,158), Punjabi (3,887) and Mandarin (1,888). This suggests no provision exists for the teaching and learning of many languages. Some of these languages have very small numbers of speakers, but notable omissions, in order of pupil numbers, are Romanian (1,740), Lithuanian (1,070), Bengali (1,005), Latvian (851), Malayalam (811), Hungarian (649) and Slovak (588). The research also highlighted a lack of provision for asylum seekers and refugees.

While there are some well-established complementary schools funded from student fees and using mainstream school premises, much of the provision is constrained by lack of resources. The survival of the schools often relies on the campaigning strength of community members to chase restricted grants from local councils or pursue subsidies from embassies or consulates. Comments from complementary schools indicated sources of financial support from overseas governments and Scottish local authorities were becoming more difficult to access due to budgetary constraints. It came to our attention that at least two Chinese schools and a Bengali school have closed recently as a result of withdrawal of funding.

Like other studies, the survey revealed a mixed profile of teachers working at the complementary schools. These included registered teachers trained in Scotland, teachers who qualified outside the UK, visiting international students, and unqualified volunteer parents. Schools largely depended on a prescriptive curriculum and teaching to the textbook. Some schools imported home-country textbooks

whilst others employed textbooks designed specifically for foreign language learning; some schools used a mixture. Challenges include finding suitable teaching resources for Scottish-born children and young people, lack of technology to support teaching and learning, and a perceived mismatch in teaching styles between mainstream and complementary schools.

There is a diverse range of learners attending complementary schools in terms of language proficiencies, home literacy practices, and migration histories. This means that teachers have to adapt to the diverse language proficiencies and learning needs of children and young people, some of whom may not have the heritage language of the school as the main home language. It is therefore not surprising that a key area for teachers' professional learning and development is greater knowledge of "differentiation". Active learning and classroom management were also considered as priorities for teachers' professional learning in the survey.

The survey revealed complementary schools are keen to enter their students for Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) or English Board examinations where their community language is available, and many schools prepare their students for these examinations. However, complementary schools did not always have access to a General Teaching Council (Scotland) (GTCS) registered teacher to help with the controlled assessments. This is compounded by the fact that languages such as Polish are not a subject area taught in Scottish Schools. Consequently, the GTCS does not have a registration category for the teachers of that language who have obtained their teaching qualifications in another country.

The majority of complementary schools relied on mainstream schools and independent schools or colleges to enter students for examinations. Parents also play a key role in registering their children as external candidates and paying the examination fees. The absence of an SQA examination was reported as a major concern by the Polish and Russian communities in the survey.

Complementary schools are not without their critics. Some scholars argue that this type of part-time provision means learners are unable to develop their first language skills to a sophisticated and academic level. Three schools indicated that they valued their independence and did not think that the 1+2 Language Strategy was relevant to them because they had their own prescribed curriculum. Moreover, provision includes faith-based classes such as the teaching and learning of religious scripts in gurdwaras and mosques.

On the other hand, 18 of the 21 responses from complementary schools indicated that they were outward-facing and looking for opportunities to share cultural experiences with wider society, that they encouraged "non-native" speakers to attend, and were also keen to connect better with local authorities and mainstream schools to support the 1+2 Language Strategy. However, the vast majority of the schools, 16 out of 21, had not been contacted by their local authority to be invited to any discussions about the development of the Language Strategy in their area. Of the five schools that had been involved in meetings with their local authority partners regarding the 1+2 Language Strategy, several indicated that these were either not frequent enough or not particularly productive.

Implications for policy and practice

In this section we consider the implications of the findings from the national survey for policy and practice in three key areas: support mechanisms, teachers' professional learning and pupils' language qualifications.

Models of provision

The mixed picture of provision revealed in the audit requires a flexible approach to support the 1+2 Language Strategy and cater for the diverse needs, perspectives and aspirations of the heritage language learners and their communities. These types of support can include:

- Complementary schools as a distinctive branch of provision but with mainstream schools acknowledging and celebrating pupils' language-learning achievements gained through complementary school provision. This aligns well with Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence*, which values learning outside of school. The research revealed that only one complementary school used the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) for assessment purposes. The CEFR Compendium with new descriptors can act as a supplementary assessment tool for gaining credit, and learners can act as social agents and reflect on their plurilingual repertoires and language learning across social and educational contexts.
- Personalised learning in mainstream schools and communities. For children and young people who are geographically isolated or without access to a teacher, advances in technology can be utilized for learning-at-distance. Models of this type include *Confucius Classrooms* for the teaching and learning of Mandarin and *e-Sgoil* for the teaching and learning of Gaelic. This type of service delivery can be extended to include a range of heritage languages in response to demand from schools, parents and pupils as part of the 1+2 Language Strategy. The Hub concept includes the sharing of ideas and the production and dissemination of appropriate resources. In addition, Hubs can also be extended to partner schools in a country that speaks the heritage language, professional learning opportunities, and the use of GTCS standards for exchange teachers.
- Complementary schools and mainstream schools working in partnership. For information and guidance on partnership arrangements see [Ramalingam and Griffith \(2015\)](#). Suggestions for collaboration include promoting joint training, co-constructed lessons, shared curriculum development and opportunities for reciprocal paired observations of teaching and learning. This model of collaborative professionalism benefits both teachers and learners.
- Mainstreaming provision for community languages as part of the 1+2 model. In this way the status of community languages can be raised by opening them up to all learners and avoids community language speakers feeling they have been assigned to a fringe activity which emphasises their inferior status. This model of support requires suitably qualified teachers of community languages.

- The Scottish Government in collaboration with Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and local authorities should consider different funding options to complementary schools and establish partnership agreements that support their longer-term viability. This funding model would formalise the role of complementary schools and this contract would include the opening up of resources (such as online access and learning platforms) and facilities in mainstream schools or public buildings and the sharing of services. This agreement could include mentoring for Quality Framework Awards, which recognise outstanding good practice for innovation in areas described in the Code of Practice for Supplementary Schools, with the support of the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education (NRCSE).

Teachers' qualifications and professional learning

A survey of community language teachers should be conducted to gain an understanding of their needs and aspirations of working in complementary and mainstream schools. This audit will assist recruitment, retention and workforce plans to support the implementation of 1+2 and the teaching of community languages.

A consortium involving GTCS, local authorities and Higher Education Institutions should develop a coherent Professional Learning strategy for people who have a community language background to develop their professionalism and raise their status. This professional learning can be delivered and accessed depending on the individuals' experience and qualifications such as joint mainstream school or local authority professional development, award-bearing courses or alternative pathways into teaching. Universities should also consider scholarship and bursary opportunities.

GTCS should play a leading role in building the capacity of registered community language teachers in complementary and mainstream schools by revisiting their registration categories, eligibility criteria and foreign residency requirements for modern foreign languages. Clear advice is also needed for teachers qualified outside the UK to help them navigate the application process for teacher registration.

Learners' language qualifications

It is important that community language learners get formal recognition of their language skills to support employability and access to higher education. Against a backdrop of declining numbers of students taking up languages in secondary schools and in universities, the SQA needs to review and extend the suite of languages offered at certificate level to reflect the linguistic communities it serves and support the implementation of the 1+2 Language Strategy. For example, for complementary schools, SQA only offers certification in Urdu, Mandarin, French, German and Spanish, but neglects important community languages such as Polish, Arabic, Russian and Punjabi. There needs to be greater synergy between mainstream schools and complementary schools where mainstream schools can act as examination hubs for community languages.

Conclusion

This policy paper argues that there is a need to build on the ongoing development and implementation of the 1+2 Language Strategy and the increasing number of children and young people in Scottish schools who are learning community languages outside of mainstream schools. This requires revisiting the commitment contained within the Language Strategy to further develop links involving “foreign language communities” and “teaching the community languages of pupils in schools”. A number of suggestions have been put forward to support partnership arrangements, teachers’ professional learning and learners’ qualifications. If Scotland does not capitalize on the linguistic potential of its citizens it will further limit the workforce of community language teachers, bilingual support assistants and interpreters/translators. This lost opportunity and the squandering of multilingual resources will have an impact on Scotland’s global outlook in a post-Brexit world.

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Resources

For a leaflet explaining how complementary schools can work with mainstream schools, see <https://www.ippr.org/files/publications/pdf/supplementaryschools-yourschool.pdf>.

For films about a multilingual digital storytelling project linking mainstream and complementary schools, see <https://goldsmithsmdst.com>.

Further reading

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